

## Crownsville, MD – Together We Can Bring Peace - UN International Day of Peace

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Crownsville, MD – Together We Can Bring Peace was the title of a peace breakfast forum in observance of the United Nations' International Day of Peace, co-sponsored by the Maryland Governor's Office of Community Initiatives and The Universal Peace Federation of Maryland, and led by Ms. Jennifer Gray, Director of Interfaith Outreach for the Governor and Mrs. Tomiko Duggan, Director of UPF-US, DC office.

The gathering on September 28th, at the Maryland Government office for Community, offered breakfast and endless coffee before the six-person panel began their comments on the assigned topics.

Jennifer Gray welcomed the 40 guests to the ground-breaking gathering of interfaith leaders. Dr. Manon Gurley offered the invocation and the four women and two men who addressed the individual question each was given by Ms. Grey.

First to speak was Dr. Homayra Ziad, a scholar at the Institute of Islamic, Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore. Her question was: What are the values and ethical foundations that are common to all religions? She began talking about the need for deep self-knowledge and that in Islam it is important to know oneself and bear witness to one's religion through service. She said that each person will come to face God in one's life, and at that "primordial moment, we carry the immortal spirit, which is God." From this experience, we strive to seek higher self-knowledge which is a gift from the benevolent God. She said it is difficult to be a moral steward in our life, but through ethical involvement in the world we bear witness to what is good and bear witness to the injustices of the world. She said diverse voices in advocacy become allies with a firm hand of friendship for all.

Rabbi Batya Steinlauf, Director of Social Justice and Inter-Group Initiatives, at the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington, DC, was given the question: What would it take for the world to be more peaceful? She spoke on the realization that during Yom Kippur each person must resolve their problems with others, then come before God and resolve and repent for one's own sins; but that the list of sins given by Judaism isn't just what the individual has committed, but that each person is part of a community and we are responsible for the sins of the community as well, because we are part of a group, and not separate. We must own our role as an individual within the community. She said if we can create a community of individuals who realize what a community must do – strive for justice, which then leads to peace and the truth can be realized. We should all honor the dignity of each human being, thus honoring God's creation of each person. If we disrespect a human being, we disrespect God, as we all are in His Image. She concluded, "We should say this out loud because silence implies consent to a wrong thing."

The third speaker was Reverend Doctor Carletta Allen, the lead pastor at Asbury United Methodist Church in Baltimore. She answered the question: The problems confronting the world are too great for each religious community to work in isolation; what universal actions can religious communities take for human rights. She started by saying that we cannot work in isolation and expect things to change. How a

religion is used in society determines how things go. She is an ecumenist. “We all should do less talking about the things that divide us and more on how we can be together as friends,” she said. If we work together to do something, it is an organic experience. We should come together to work on ‘hospitality’, meaning on migration and immigration. “We have allowed our religious traditions to be highjacked by the patriarchy aspects of society resulting in bad practices and unhealthy agendas,” she stated, and continued, “Only love manifested can save us.” She said we need to “re-radicalize our youth for truth, love, and justice.” She encouraged the audience to, “Welcome all others, we all are images of one God. We should help beyond religions, respond to humanity’s needs – together.” She concluded with, “There is no greater action than to value each and every human being.”



The fourth speaker was Ms. Nadia S. Hassan, founder, and director of the Young Leaders Institute. She was asked: Would people need to change how they think, for the world to be peaceful? Her immediate answer was, “yes, of course.” She said we need to teach young people how to think about others in order to reach their own potential and reach one’s best true self. This is the work she does at her institute. She stated, “Everyone needs critical thinking skills and reconciliation skills. Thoughts become words, which are followed by actions which invariably creates the character you have.” She added that it is important for parents to teach their children that it’s possible for others to be correct, even though you think you are correct. She cited the Koran c. 13.v. 11, where it states that God does not change the condition of a people unless they change what is in themselves. She said, “we should be the change we want to see.” Poverty, oppression, wars, and injustice occur all over the world, but we must, as Michael Jackson sang it, “begin with the man (or woman) in the mirror.” She quoted the speech title of UPF co-founder, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, by saying, “Peace begins with me. I must think, speak, and live peace,” she concluded.

Rev. Medgar L. Reid, DD, followed the four women speakers mentioning the main point of each speaker’s comments. He is the Director of Spiritual Care and Chaplaincy Services. He answered the question: World peace originates with inner peace; how can we better live together as part of the human community? He asked the audience, “How can we better live with ourselves? We are not ‘human doings’ but ‘human beings’.” Because we are here on this earth, we deserve dignity and respect. Unfortunately, even though human rights have improved, it is also violated, we are out of sync. “Mindfulness is the key,” he said. We have all been conditioned by the media and society even in the womb, up to age seven we are impressed with false realities. He continued saying, “When you are mindful of who you are, and mindful of who you belong to (God), your collective thoughts and heart cause the world around you to coalesce, we shouldn’t just rely on our intellect. We should elevate our sense of spirituality and consciousness and your presence will automatically elevate all those around you.” He shared the seven points that guide his life and that he encourages others to follow as well, BRASSRI:

1. Belonging: Each person needs belonging, we need to belong to something to someone, and we get ideas and actions from others. It is a driving force, ‘I am here because I belong.’
2. Respect: Each person desires to be respected for who they are, authentically. No feigned respect to get something from him. Genuine respect comes from just being human.
3. Appreciation: Each person wants to hear affirmative words, from your father, your uncle, your spouse.

4. Success: The man or woman in the mirror is determined, and looks within to see ‘what is the desire of my heart?’ We need to define what is my success, not the definition of someone else.
5. Safety: Each person wants to live in safety, not in a constant and stressful “fight or flight” situation; a situation of constant fear.
6. Romance: Each person desires real romance, and not necessarily with another person. A walk in nature can be ‘romantic’ to the individual, it means to take a break, take time away from stress to re-group and re-energize.
7. Inspiration: We all need to be inspired, this doesn’t mean motivation which has a negative connotation. Inspiration is positive and fills us with energy. Recently I did my first marathon, 26.2 miles, inspired by a friend. I call it, ‘Fat guys run too!’

In conclusion, he said, “Hurting people hurt people, be always mindful of our inner voice and try to be at peace within ourselves.”



The final speaker of the day was Mr. Tom McDevitt, Chairman of the Washington Times, who responded to the question: Vision for the future; what strategies can be developed to transform structures of violence into structures of sustainability and peace” He began by saying, “Having vision and strategy is very important to my life and work.” He commented that “This is a sacred space, with the presence of this five great-people and their words spoken, are sacred.” He commended the organizers for making a remarkable program. He said, “We should hold this kind of meeting in each county, town, and area.” He also said we should identify the important strategies, this meeting is one good strategy. He reported on another great strategy, the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace, which was founded by Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, founder of UPF and the Washington Times. By gathering parliamentarians together in dialogue, many good strategies and the sharing of good insights can be done. The next conference will be in Africa. He stated that four points are necessary:

1. People need to congregate, meet each other and discuss important content.
2. Thought leadership is needed, training necessary and growth will follow, we need to get the content out to the greater society.
3. Collaboration is essential, we make a mistake thinking that the government is the only solution, it is needed, but we also need a multi-sector input, from the media, faith community, corporate and private groups.
4. Vision is needed. The strategy supports both a vision and a goal. We need a common vision to work together for peace. Mind and body unity, peace ‘begins with me.’

It is also essential that we support and focus on the family. The family is where the important values can be learned.

He praised “Mother Moon” when she spoke at the Kennedy Caucus Room, at the Dirksen Senate Office building in December of last year. She boldly started her comments with, “Human beings alone cannot



solve the problems of the world. We need God’s guidance to solve the horrific problems of the world.” He urged the group to find ‘like-minded people in your own zip code to create a group to work with.’



A lively question and answer session showed that the members of the audience were both moved by the speakers’ comments, but also wanted to know “what is next.” One answer came from Tom McDevitt who said, “Let’s do this again, county by county, city by city, village by village. I will assist in this process.”

An Ambassador for Peace appointment ceremony followed, led by Susan Fefferman, AFP director, and Tomiko Duggan. Ms. Jennifer Gray, Ms. Nadia Hassan, and Bishop Keith Allen and his wife, Paulette Allen were all commissioned to be Ambassadors for Peace.

Mr. Steve McAdams, Executive Director of the Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives thanked everyone for attending and encouraged everyone to work together with the state offices of Community Initiatives. Many conversations and the exchange of many business cards followed the invigorating program.

Mrs. Jennifer Gray loved the podium sign, “Peace Starts With Me” so much and requested UPF to leave it with her. She said the sign, “Peace Starts With Me” will be placed on my office door from now on.

